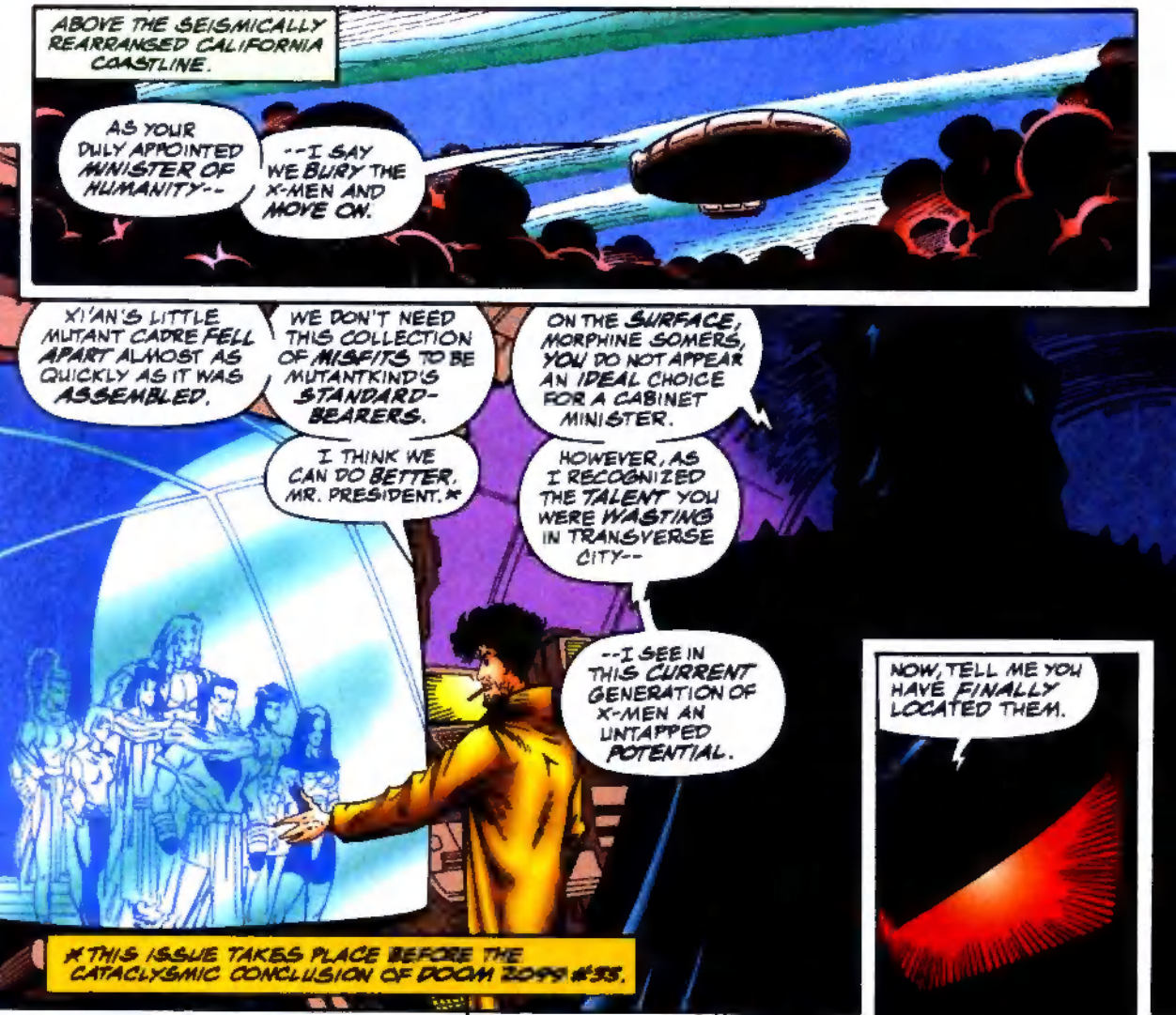
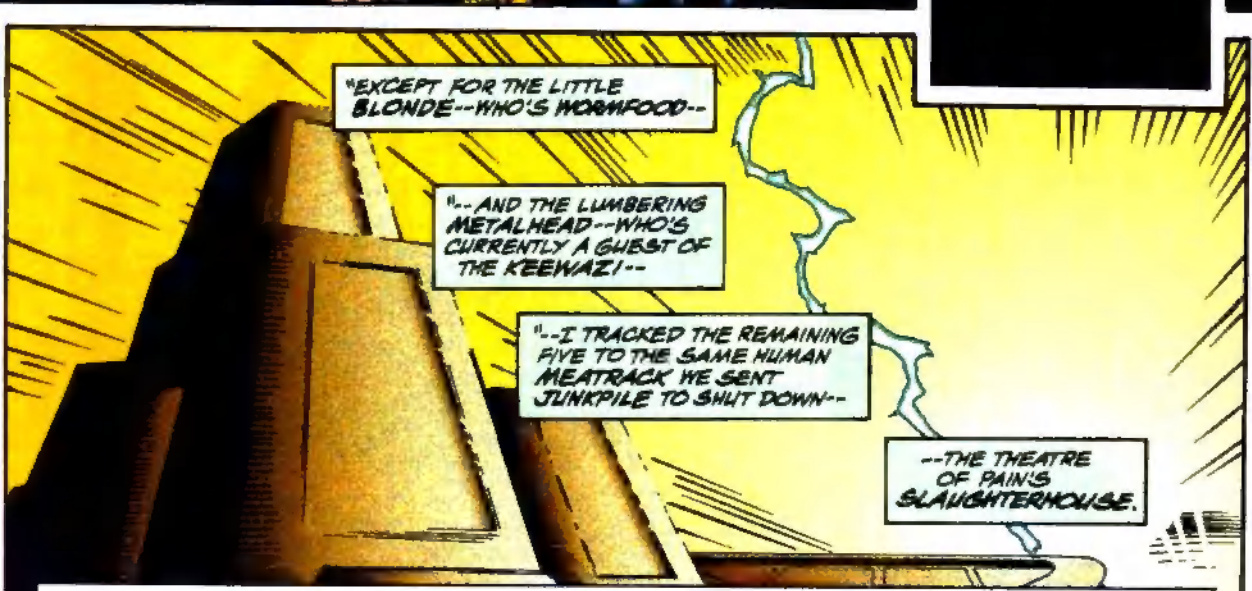

ABOVE THE SEISMICALLY REARRANGED CALIFORNIA COASTLINE.
AS YOUR DULY APPOINTED MINISTER OF HUMANITY--
--I SAY WE BURY THE X-MEN AND MOVE ON.
XI'AN'S LITTLE MUTANT CADRE FELL APART ALMOST AS QUICKLY AS IT WAS ASSEMBLED.
WE DON'T NEED THIS COLLECTION OF MISFITS TO BE MUTANTKIND'S STANDARD-BEARERS.
I THINK WE CAN DO BETTER, MR. PRESIDENT.*
ON THE SURFACE, MORPHINE SOMERS, YOU DO NOT APPEAR AN IDEAL CHOICE FOR A CABINET MINISTER.
HOWEVER, AS I RECOGNIZED THE TALENT YOU WERE WASTING IN TRANSVERSE CITY--
--I SEE IN THIS CURRENT GENERATION OF X-MEN AN UNTAPPED POTENTIAL.
*THIS ISSUE TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE CATACLYSMIC CONCLUSION OF DOOM 2099 #35.


NOW, TELL ME YOU HAVE FINALLY LOCATED THEM.
"EXCEPT FOR THE LITTLE BLONDE--WHO'S HORNFOOD--
"--AND THE LUMBERING METALHEAD--WHO'S CURRENTLY A GUEST OF THE KEEWAZI--
"--I TRACKED THE REMAINING FIVE TO THE SAME HUMAN MEATRACK WE SENT JUNKPILE TO SHUT DOWN--
--THE THEATRE OF PAIN'S SLAUGHTERHOUSE.

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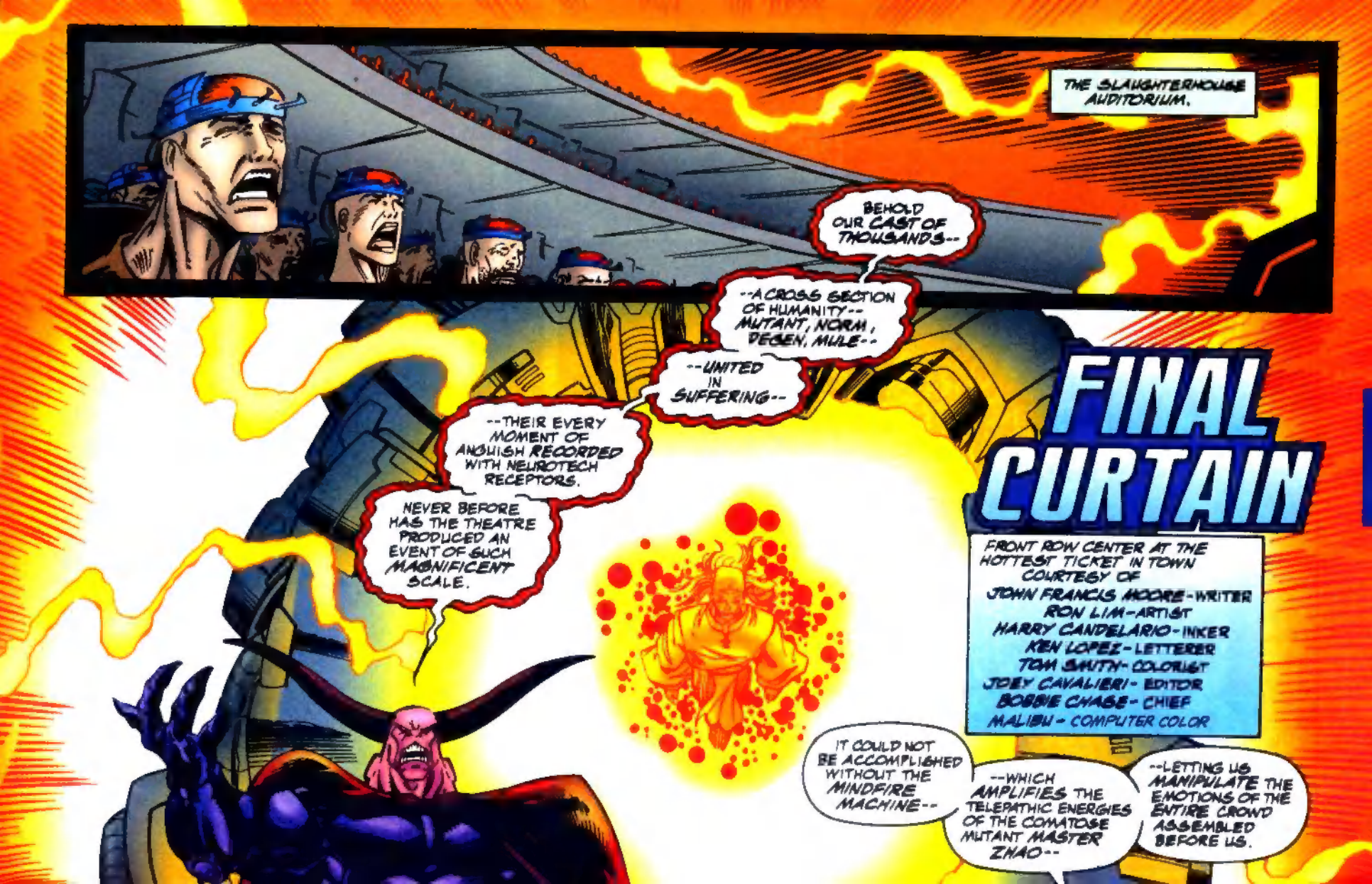

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE AUDITORIUM.
BEHOLD OUR CAST OF THOUSANDS--
--A CROSS SECTION OF HUMANITY-- MUTANT, NORM, DEGEN, MULE--
--UNITED IN SUFFERING--
--THEIR EVERY MOMENT OF ANGUISH RECORDED WITH NEUROTECH RECEPTORS.
NEVER BEFORE HAS THE THEATRE PRODUCED AN EVENT OF SUCH MAGNIFICENT SCALE.
FINAL CURTAIN
FRONT ROW CENTER AT THE HOTTEST TICKET IN TOWN COURTESY OF
JOHN FRANCIS MOORE - WRITER
RON LIM - ARTIST
HARRY CANDELARIO - INKER
KEN LOPEZ - LETTERER
TOM SMITH - COLORIST
JOEY CAVALIERI - EDITOR
BOBBIE CHASE - CHIEF
MALIBU - COMPUTER COLOR
IT COULD NOT BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT THE MINDFIRE MACHINE--
--WHICH AMPLIFIES THE TELEPATHIC ENERGIES OF THE COMATOSE MUTANT MASTER ZHAO--
--LETTING US MANIPULATE THE EMOTIONS OF THE ENTIRE CROWD ASSEMBLED BEFORE US.

XI'AN-- PLEASE-- STOP THIS NOW!
CAN'T YOU SEE THAT BRIMSTONE LOVE HAS TURNED YOU INTO A PSYCHO-SADISTIC MONSTER?
DOES THAT MEAN YOU DISAPPROVE, SHAKTI HADDAD?
YOU AND YOUR THEATRE ARE PARASITES--
--PREYING ON THE PAIN AND VULNERABILITY OF INNOCENTS--

YOU ARE NAIVE, GIRL.
FROM THE BEGINNING OF SOCIETY, THE WEAK AND HELPLESS HAVE PROVIDED SPORT FOR THE RICH AND POWERFUL.
I FOUNDED THE THEATRE MANY, MANY YEARS AGO FOR THE SELECT AND PRIVILEGED FEW--
--HUNGRY FOR PERFORMANCES WHERE THE EMOTIONS ARE GENUINE AND THE BLOOD REAL--
--AND WILLING TO PAY TO SATISFY THOSE DARK URGES.
ACROSS THE GLOBE, OUR ELITE AUDIENCE HAS PLUGGED INTO AN EXCLUSIVE SENSORY SIMULCAST--
--VICARIOUSLY INDULGING IN THE MAGNUM OPUS OF MISERY ORCHESTRATED FROM THIS STAGE.

BE PROUD OF YOUR FRIEND, SHAKTI--
WITH THE MINDFIRE MACHINE, HE HAS FULLY JUSTIFIED MY FAITH IN HIM.
I KNEW HE HAD THE CRUEL CALCULATION TO BE ONE OF MY CONTROLLERS.
WHAT I AM, I OWE TO YOU, BRIMSTONE.
XI'AN, FOR PITY'S SAKE, YOU'RE NO TORTURER.
YOU'VE BEEN UNBALANCED SINCE MASTER ZHAO INVADED YOUR MIND IN NEW MEXICO--
--NOW BRIMSTONE LOVE'S PUSHED YOU OVER THE EDGE.
MY PAST LIFE NO LONGER MATTERS. I AM PART OF THE THEATRE NOW.
AS YOU ARE INVITED TO BE. WE CAN MAKE USE OF YOUR MEDICAL SKILLS.
NEVER!
THEN JOIN THE REST OF THE EXTRAS IN TONIGHT'S PERFORMANCE.
YOU HAVE SUPPRESSED A LIFETIME OF EMOTION, SHAKTI--
IT WILL PROVE FASCINATING TO FIND WHAT LIES BENEATH YOUR COOL FACADE.
THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE DOING, XI'AN--
YOU'RE HURTING THE PEOPLE YOU ONCE SWORE TO PROTECT.
THAT IS, AS THEY SAY, SHOW BUSINESS.
HA! AND ON THAT NOTE, LET THE SHOW BEGIN!

SUBLEVEL FOURTEEN.
YOU NEVER SHOULD HAVE RUN AWAY FROM THE THEATRE, LUNATICA.
WE'RE YOUR FAMILY, SISTER. YOU WERE RAISED TO BE ONE OF US.
YOU WERE BORN TO BE A NORN.
FELICITY, I AM NOT YOUR SISTER--
--AND I WON'T BE CHAINED LIKE AN ANIMAL!
UNNNGGOH...
ZZZKKRROW
DON'T WORRY, SISTER, THE VOLTAGE MAY BE EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL BUT IT'S NOT FATAL.
BRIMSTONE LOVE WANTS YOU ALIVE--
--A PITY THAT THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID OF THE MUTANTS WITH WHOM YOU ARRIVED.
TIM...

WASTE DISPOSAL CENTER 7C.
WONDERFUL.
IT'S NOT ENOUGH THAT LUNA'S SORORITY SISTERS TOSSED ME INTO THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE TRASHBIN--
--WHOSE INSULATED WALLS PREVENT ME FROM DRAWING ENERGY FROM INTERIOR CIRCUITRY--
NO, JUST WHEN I'M SURE THINGS CAN'T POSSIBLY GET WORSE--
--I FIND OUT I'M NOT ALONE.
GR.R.R.MMMPH
DON'T I KNOW YOU, MEAT?
JUNKPILE?!?

WITH A MUG LIKE MINE, YOU GOTTA ASK? OF COURSE IT'S ME, FITZGERALD.
LAST THING I REMEMBER WAS THROWIN' DOWN WITH THAT BULL-HORNED BRIMSTONE LOVE--
LOOKS LIKE I KINDA LOST.
YOU MEAN THE SOLVENT DRAIN.
NO PROBLEM. ALL WE GOTTA DO IS SHUT THE SHOCKIN' THING.
EASIER SAID THAN DONE. IT'S OUT OF REACH.
MY FIRST INSTINCT IS TO GO FOR YOUR THROAT, JUNKPILE, BUT I'M RESTRAINING MYSELF.
WE HAVE A MORE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM.
FIGURE WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME BEFORE THAT BABY OPENS UP--
--AND SENDS ENOUGH INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH CLEANER TO LIQUIFY EVERYTHING IN HERE.
I GET THE PICTURE. UNLESS WE DO SOMETHING FAST--
--YOU AND ME ARE SOUP.

THE KEEWAZI NATION, OKLAHOMA.
ROSA, YOUR PSYCHO EX-BOYFRIEND GLITTERSPIKE HAS JUST LITERALLY CRAWLED OUT FROM UNDER A ROCK--
--AND JUDGING BY HIS EXPRESSION, HE'S NURSING ONE GIANT-SIZED GRUDGE.
SO MAYBE NOW IS NOT THE BEST TIME TO GO INTO LABOR.
NOT LIKE I HAVE MUCH CHOICE, EDDIE-- UNHHFF--
--I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE DUE FOR ANOTHER-- UHHNN-- THREE WEEKS--
--GUESS THIS LITTLE NIGO JUST CAN'T HUNHH--WAIT.
BACK OFF, GLITTERSPIKE!
IF YOU CARE ANYTHING ABOUT THE BABY, LET ME GET ROSA BACK TO TOWN.
SO THAT DEGEN FREAKSHOW AND YOUR FAITHFUL INDIAN COMPANIONS CAN HIDE HER FROM ME?
NOT A CHANCE. I'M HERE TO TAKE BACK WHAT'S RIGHTFULLY MINE--

--AND I'LL GLADLY DO IT OVER YOUR DEAD BODY, METALHEAD.
YOU FORGET THAT MY BODY CAN ASSUME THE PROPERTIES OF ANY METAL IT'S EVER TOUCHED--
--INCLUDING THE ALIEN METAL OF THE SHADOW-DANCER'S SPACECRAFT--
--A METAL STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL.
I WAS WEAKENED BY THE LACK OF LIGHT THE LAST TIME WE FOUGHT--
--BUT NOW I HAVE THE DESERT SUN FROM WHICH TO DRAW MY POWER.
GAARGHH
AND WITH A BLADE OF LIGHT ONLY MOLECULES WIDE--
--I CAN EASILY PIERCE YOUR HIDE--NO MATTER IT'S METAL FORM.
NOW BEFORE YOU DRAW YOUR LAST BREATH CONGRATULATE ME.
--I'M GOING TO BE A FATHER.
HOOOO...
EDDIE!

TRANSPORTATION BAY.
SORRY, QUIV' THOUGHT I COULD GET US OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE BAY DOORS CLOSED--
--BUT AT LEAST WE'RE BOTH OKAY--
--RIGHT?
SHAM, M-MAYBE I SHOULD DRIVE NEXT TIME.
IF THERE IS A NEXT TIME.
GET UP, MUTIES. YOU'RE GOING BACK TO THE RESEARCH LABS--
--WHICH IS WHERE YOU GENEJOKES BELONG.
DON'T WORRY, QUIVER, I GOT THIS COVERED.
BZZZ
Z-Z-Z-Z
BZZZZ
BZZZZ
WHAT THE SHOCK?!?
LOOK OUT! THOSE THINGS ARE [redacted] ENOUGH TO BITE YOUR HEAD OFF!
IGNORE THE INSECTS. THEY'RE NO MORE REAL THAN THAT CAGE OF THORNS. *
IT'S JUST ANOTHER ILLUSION CREATED BY THE LITTLE GIRL'S MUTANT [redacted]
* LAST ISSUE. --JOEY

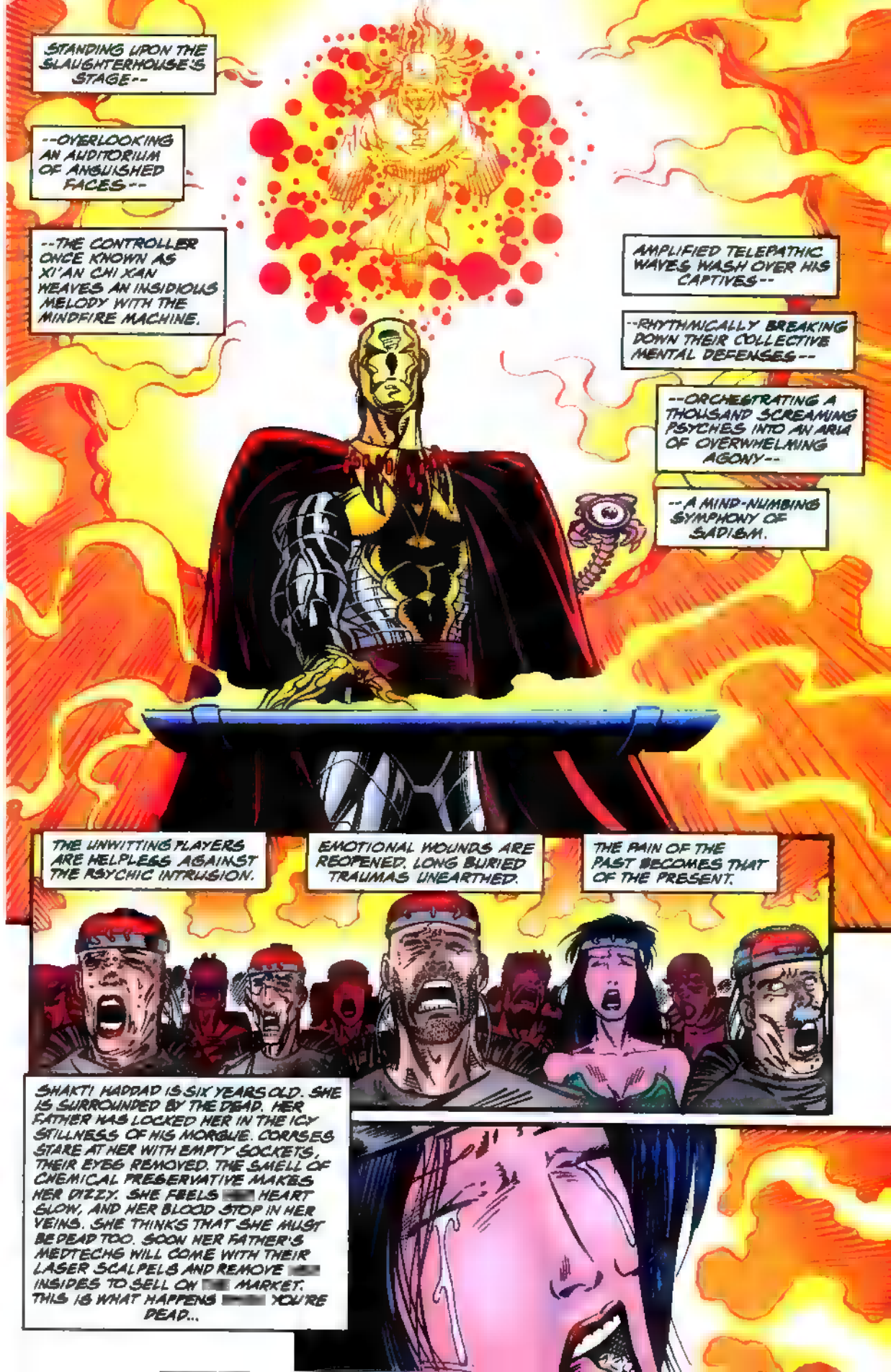
NICE TRY, THOUGH.
NOW WE'RE IN TROUBLE.
VVWWOOOOOSHH
HUH?
IS THIS AN ILLUSION, TOO?
NO. YOUR EYES DO NOT DECEIVE YOU--
--YOU ARE MOST DEFINITELY [illegible]
I HOWEVER AM NOT.
KRYSTALIN?
ONE BO STICK MADE TO ORDER.
HAVE I MENTIONED HO■ MUCH THUGS LIKE YOU ANNOY ME?
YOU NEVER BOTHER TO QUESTION THE MORALITY OF A PLACE LIKE THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE.
NO, WHY SHOULD YOU? YOU GET OFF ON INTIMIDATING THE WEAK AND DEFENSELESS.
THWAP
THWAP
THWAP
CLANGK
CLANGK
CLANGK

WHO [redacted] YOU? YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE YOU'RE WITH THE THEATRE OF PAIN.
NO. WE'RE MORE LIKE THEATRE CRITICS.
I'M KRYS. THIS IS MENRI.
YOU FORMED THIS STICK OUT OF NOTHING.
YEAH, KRYS MAKES ALL SORTS OF NIFTY STUFF. YOU SHOULD SEE HER HOLIDAY GIFTS.
AMAZING.
IF YOU'RE WITH SHIELD, YOU BETTER CALL FOR BACKUP--
AGENTS OF SHIELD? I DON'T THINK SO. [redacted] OPERATE OUTSIDE OF THE LAW.
--CAUSE [redacted] OF YOUR BIG METAL MARSHALS JUST GOT HIS BUTT ROYALLY KICKED BY BRIMSTONE LOVE.
AND, AS SOON AS I BREAK THE ACCESS CODE TO THE BAY DOORS--
KLIK
--WE'LL HAVE ALL THE BACKUP WE NEED.
SAY HELLO TO BLOODHAWK, KIDS.
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG, MEANSTREAK?
I HAD LITTLE CLOUD COVER IN WHICH TO CONCEAL MYSELF WHILE I WAITED FOR YOUR SIGNAL.

SHAM, EVERY MOMENT WE STAY HERE WITH THESE PEOPLE--
--WE RISK BEING CAPTURED AGAIN.
LET'S GO. NOW.
THE FLOOR'S SHAKING.
ARE YOU DOING THAT?
QUIVER REGISTERS ON THE RICHTER SCALE WHEN HE'S NERVOUS.
I CAN'T HELP MYSELF.
MUTANTS?
YEAH, WE'RE MUTANTS. GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT, RED?
I DO NOT WISH TO BABYSIT CHILDREN, KRYSTALIN.
THEY'RE NOT WITH US, HAWK.
AS FOR YOU TWO, I SUGGEST YOU KEEP A LOW PROFILE.
WE'RE GOING TO START SOME FIREWORKS, AND I DON'T WANT YOU CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE.
WE ARE GOING TO BURN THIS CHARNEL HOUSE TO THE GROUND.
THE THEATRE HAS CAUSED ME GREAT PAIN.*
I OWE THEM IN KIND.
X-MEN 2099 # 4.

SUBLEVEL FOURTEEN.
DO THEY INTEND TO LEAVE ME HERE UNTIL I ROT TO DEATH--
--OR DO THEY THINK I'LL GO MAD [redacted] THE ISOLATION?
THEY'VE TURNED OFF THE ELECTRICITY AND UNLOCKED THE CUFFS.
THEY WANT ME TO ESCAPE.
CH-CHUKK
CH-CHUKK
I'M BEING LED LIKE A RAT [redacted] MAZE.
IF I'M WALKING INTO A TRAP, I'M GOING TO GO DOWN FIGHTING.
ENTER, YOUNG ONE--
--THE ONLY DANGER YOU FACE IS FROM YOURSELF.
AFTER YOU DESTROYED YOUR CONTROLLER'S MIND AND ESCAPED INTO THE DESERT--
--I WANTED YOU CAPTURED AT ANY COST.
HOWEVER, WHEN THAT PURSUIT LED ME TO X'IAN CHI XAN, I DECIDED TO ALLOW YOU A TEMPORARY FREEDOM.
YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW GRATIFYING IT IS TO SEE THAT YOU HAVE RETURNED TO THE THEATRE VOLUNTARILY.

I'LL DIE BEFORE I LET YOU PUT THAT SLAVE COLLAR ON ME AGAIN, BRIMSTONE.
SAVE YOUR DRAMATICS FOR THE STAGE, LITTLE GIRL.
WHOMP
THE THEATRE IS IN YOUR BLOOD, LUNA. IN MORE WAYS THAN YOU KNOW.
IF I GET MY HANDS ON YOU, I WILL MAKE YOU SUFFER BEYOND ANYTHING YOU KNOW--
--I WILL FEED ON EVERY LAST MOMENT OF YOUR PAIN, AND I WILL LAUGH.
AN EMPTY THREAT, LUNA.
EVEN WITHOUT THIS COLLAR, YOUR PSYCHIC VAMPIRISM WOULD HAVE NO EFFECT ON ME.
AFTER ALL, I'M FAMILY.
NOOOOO!


STANDING UPON THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE'S STAGE--
--OVERLOOKING AN AUDITORIUM OF ANGUISHED FACES--
--THE CONTROLLER ONCE KNOWN AS XI'AN CHI XAN WEAVES AN INSIDIOUS MELODY WITH THE MINDFIRE MACHINE.
AMPLIFIED TELEPATHIC WAVES WASH OVER HIS CAPTIVES--
--RHYTHMICALLY BREAKING DOWN THEIR COLLECTIVE MENTAL DEFENSES--
--ORCHESTRATING A THOUSAND SCREAMING PSYCHES INTO AN ARIA OF OVERWHELMING AGONY--
--A MIND-NUMBING SYMPHONY OF SADISM.
THE UNWITTING PLAYERS ARE HELPLESS AGAINST THE PSYCHIC INTRUSION.
EMOTIONAL WOUNDS ARE REOPENED. LONG BURIED TRAUMAS UNEARTHED.
THE PAIN OF THE PAST BECOMES THAT OF THE PRESENT.
SHAKTI HADDAD IS SIX YEARS OLD. SHE IS SURROUNDED BY THE DEAD. HER FATHER HAS LOCKED HER IN THE ICY STILLNESS OF HIS MORGUE. CORPSES STARE AT HER WITH EMPTY SOCKETS, THEIR EYES REMOVED. THE SMELL OF CHEMICAL PRESERVATIVE MAKES HER DIZZY. SHE FEELS [redacted] HEART SLOW, AND HER BLOOD STOP IN HER VEINS. SHE THINKS THAT SHE MUST BE DEAD TOO. SOON HER FATHER'S MEDTECHS WILL COME WITH THEIR LASER SCALPELS AND REMOVE [redacted] INSIDES TO SELL ON [redacted] MARKET. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS [redacted] YOU'RE DEAD...

WASTE DISPOSAL CENTER 7C.
CAN'T GET A [redacted] TO PULL MYSELF UP TO THE VALVE-- BLASTED PIPE'S COVERED WITH SLI--
BETTER GET YOUR FACE OUT OF THE MUCK FAST, MEAT.
THAT ACID'S STARTIN' TO FLOW. YOU'RE GONNA FEEL THE BURN BEFORE ME.
SPLORCH
HEY, I DIDN'T SEE THIS BEFORE...
IT'S ONE OF [redacted] JUNKYARD DOGS [redacted] BUILT [redacted] ME WHEN I JOINED SHIELD.
TURNED OUT TO BE USELESS.
MAYBE NOT. BET THIS PUPPY'S GOT AN INTERNAL BATTERY. [redacted] YOU GET IT FOR ME?
SURE.
KRRUNCH
ONE ROBOTIC DOG HEART SERVED ON A PLATTER. DOES THIS HAVE A POINT?
YEAH. AS LONG AS ITS POWER CORE'S INTACT--
--RIN TIN MACHINE'S GIVEN ME THE JUICE TO GET [redacted] OUT OF HERE--
--AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON.
SSSSSS

OKLAHOMA.
ALEXI--UNHH--YOU AND I BOTH KNOW YOU DON'T--UHHN--REALLY WANT THE BABY.
YOU JUST--MMMPHH--WANT TO GET BACK AT ME FOR WALKING OUT ON YOU.
DARLING, WITH [redacted] SON'S PEDIGREE, [redacted] GOT A GENOTYPE WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN PLATINUM.
I WILL SELL THE WHELP TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.
YOU'RE HEART-LESS.
THAT BABY IS MY PROPERTY. MINE. DO YOU UNDER--
[redacted]
CAN'T MOVE...
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME...
ROSA, ARE YOU DOING THAT...
NO, EDDIE, IT'S THE BABY.
HE'S PROTECTING ME.

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE COMMUNICATIONS EXCHANGE.
WE'RE EXPERIENCING INTERFERENCE WITH OUR PERFORMANCE FEED, DRONES.
RECHANNEL THE UPLINK THROUGH THE DIAMANDALA SATLINK.
OUR CLIENTS EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN PRISTINE BANDWIDTH CLARITY.
YOUR CLIENTS SHOULD BE SEDATED.
THIS ABOMINATION WILL STOP NOW!
YOU HEARD THE MAN. THIS SHOW'S BEEN CANCELLED.
YOU SEE, THE TENTH CONTROLLER ANTICIPATED THIS INTERRUPTION.
YOU'LL FIND THE [illegible] IS NOT WITHOUT ITS OWN MUTANT [illegible] ARMS.
AH, YOU MUST BE THE REST OF THE SO-CALLED "X-MEN."
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO BE COWED BY [illegible] SUDDEN ENTRANCE?
I THINK NOT.
beep beep beep

THOUGHT YOU'D PUT US ON ICE FOREVER, DIDN'T YOU, X-SLAGS?
BUT YOU CAN'T KEEP THE CHOSEN DOWN. NOSIREE BOB.
WE OWE THE THEATRE OF PAIN [redacted] LIVES--
YOU WASTE TIME WITH WORDS. KILL THEM NOW, JACK.
--AND THEY WANT US TO TAKE YOURS.
WHO ARE THESE CHOSEN?
WIMBSPAN, ONE-EYED JACK, AND PSYCHO-K--
--BETA CLASS MUTANTS THE SENILE MASTER ZHAO CUSTOMIZED INTO [redacted] IMITATIONS OF THE ORIGINAL X-MEN.*
THEY WERE CRYOGENICALLY FROZEN [redacted] ZHAO'S BODYWORK CAUSED A GENETIC INSTABILITY THAT WAS KILLING THEM.
LOOKS LIKE THE THEATRE THAWED THEM OUT [redacted] EARLY.
*SEE X-MEN 2099 #8 & 9.

ZHAO CORRUPTED OUR BODIES AND MADE US WEAK. THE THEATRE RESURRECTED AND REMOLDED US.
WE ARE STRONGER AND MORE DEADLY THAN EVER BEFORE.
THE SHARPENED TIPS OF MY TECHNO-ORGANIC WINGS WILL REND YOUR LEATHERY FLESH.
ARRGHH... TOO CLOSE... NO ROOM TO MANEUVER...
YOU X-MEN LIED TO US! YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO TRY TO HELP US--
--BUT YOU DID NOTHING!
THAT'S NOT TRUE. SHAKTI HAD [redacted] TO REVERSE [redacted] GENETIC DETERIORATION--
--WHEN [redacted] THEATRE STOLE YOUR BODIES AND BLEW UP THE NEW MEXICO COMPOUND.*
WHY AM I TRYING TO REASON WITH ONE-EYED JACK?
I NEED ALL MY CONCENTRATION REGENERATING MY CRYSTAL SHIELD AGAINST [redacted] OPTIC LASER [redacted].
* X-MEN 2099 #18 AND #19, RESPECTIVELY.
I'D [redacted] ASSISTANCE, KRYS, BUT I'M HAVING TROUBLES OF MY OWN.
THE FACELESS [redacted] IS TELEKINETICALLY TRYING TO GIFT [redacted] ME [redacted] FIBER OPTIC CABLE.
FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO PICK UP SPEED, MEANSTREAK--
--WHEN YOU HAVE [redacted] TO RUN?

SUBLEVEL TEN
NICE GOING. YOU BLEW [redacted] OUT OF THE GARBAGE DUMP JUST IN TIME.
I OWE YOU, MEAT.
I DON'T WANT ANYTHING FROM YOU, JUNKPILE. [redacted] HELPED EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE HAD TO.
DON'T THINK I'VE EVER FORGOTTEN WHAT YOU DID TO GERPENTINA.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL HER, BUT IT WAS HER FAULT.
ARRRGH!
[redacted] SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN IN MY WAY--
LUNA?!?
OH NO, SHE'S WEARING AN OBEDIENCE COLLAR--
SHE'S NOT ACTING OUT OF HER OWN FREE WILL.
BETTER SHORT-CIRCUIT IT QUICKLY--
--BEFORE SHE TURNS ON ME.
SORRY, HONEY, I FIND THIS S&M ACCESSORY A REAL FASHION DON'T.
KRAK
TIM? WHAT IS JUNKPILE DOING HERE?
FORGET ABOUT HIM, WE'VE GOT TO FIND SHAKTI AND REGROUP.
WE'VE BEEN SEPARATED FOR TOO LONG. IT'S TIME [redacted] ACTED [redacted] A [redacted] AGAIN.

THE EXCHANGE.
GOT YOU BACKED AGAINST A WALL, WING-DING DADDY.
TOO BAD [redacted] WINGS ARE CONSTRAINED BY YOUR SKELETAL LIMITATIONS.
MINE ARE SELECTIVELY TENSILE--AND CAN TWIST AND TURN ANY WHICH WAY I CHOOSE.
WAIT-- MY WINGS-- ON FIRE--
JACK--K-- SOMEBODY-- HELP ME--
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE [redacted] THE NEXT AIRSPEEDER OUT.
--BUT I FIGURE THESE CRAZY MUTANTS NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET AGAINST THE THEATRE.
YOU LACK MY [redacted] SENSES, WING&PAN--
--OTHERWISE YOU WOULD'VE REALIZED THE PROJECTIONS OF A [redacted] GIRL'S IMAGINATION [redacted] YOU [redacted]--
--UNLIKE MY FIST.
GURGH
THWAKK

YOU'LL FIND THAT EVEN WITH YOUR TECHNO-ORGANIC AUGMENTATION--
--I RULE THE AIR.
NO--
SHA-KREESH
COULDN'T TELL WHAT LAY [redacted] GLASS FROM THE OTHER SIDE--
--BUT I SEEM TO HAVE STUMBLED UPON THE THEATRE'S AUD[redacted]IUM--
--AND THE ERRANT XI'AN.
[redacted]E X-MEN? AM I THE ONLY ONE [redacted] MY [redacted] ORGANIZATION [redacted] TO DEAL WITH THESE OUTLAWS?
PHILISTINE. YOU'VE INTERRUPTED MY PERFORMANCE.
URFFF... BLACKING OUT...
CHAKA-KRAK
CAN'T BELIEVE SHAM MADE US COME BACK. WHY DO I ALWAYS LISTEN TO HER?
SHE'S GOING TO GET ME KILLED [redacted] DAY.
RRRUMBLE
MY BACK...
BODY'S SHAKING LIKE A SEVEN POINTER--
--CAN'T CONTROL MY OPTIC FIRE.

THREE DOWN--THANKS TO THE TIMELY AID OF OUR NEW FRIENDS.
REMIND ME TO BUY YOU DINNER, KIDS--
--AFTER WE PULL THE CURTAIN ON THE THEATRE'S PAY PER VIEW PERVERSION.
YOU'LL NEVER GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE.
I WILL PERSONALLY SEE YOU CRUCIFIED.
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH, GRANMA--I'VE GOT TO CONCENTRATE.
I'M GOING TO PRE-EMPT THIS BROADCAST WITH MY OWN NETWORK PROGRAMMING.
YOUR RICH AND JADED AUDIENCE ENJOYS INFLICTING PAIN SO MUCH--
--I WONDER HOW MUCH THEY CAN TAKE--
--WHEN I KILL THE AUDITORIUM FEED AND REPLACE IT WITH SOME HIGH VOLUME SENSORY STATIC.
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

SOMEONE DISCONNECTED MY RESTRAINTS!
NOW I CAN [redacted] MYSELF FROM THIS INTRUSIVE NEURAL VOYEURTECH--
--THAT KEPT ME FROM RESISTING THE MINDFIRE.
SHAKTI HADDAD, HAS XI'AN BEEN SO UTTERLY SEDUCED BY THE THEATRE--
--THAT HE HAS BETRAYED HIS CLOSEST FRIEND TO ITS SADISTIC TORTURE?
BLOODHAWK! IF YOU'RE HERE--
--KRYS AND HENRI MUST [redacted] RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INTERRUPTION.
LOOK, UPON THE STAGE, THE INFERNAL CREATOR OF THIS ATROCITY SHOWS HIMSELF.
HE IS MINE, SHAKTI!
YOU ARE THE LEADER OF THIS VIPERS' NEST!
I WILL GLADLY RETURN THE SUFFERING YOU HAVE CAUSED!
IMPOSSIBLE! A HANDFUL OF MUTANTS CANNOT HAVE DISRUPTED THE GREATEST SHOW IN THEATRE HISTORY.
ARROGANT CHILD, YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED [redacted] YOUR GAMMA BASE NOVEL.
YOU KNOW NOTHING OF THE FORCES YOU FACE.
IN THE CONFUSION, NO ONE'S NOTICED I'M [redacted] STAGE.
I MUST FIND A WAY TO DISABLE THE MINDFIRE MACHINE PERMANENTLY...

I NEED NOT WIELD MY FIERY WRATH AGAINST YOU, BLOODHAWK!
YOU ARE A RABID ANIMAL WHO SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED INDOORS.
YOU NEED TO BE LEASHED.
THWAM
BRZZLAK
HEY, HEY, BRIMSTONE--
-- TOLD YOU WE'D MEET AGAIN.
FITZGERALD--?!?
TIM'S NOT THE ONE TO WORRY ABOUT-- YOU'RE GONNA ANSWER TO ME.
--AND UNDERSTAND THIS-- NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY--
--WE ARE NOT RELATED.
KEEP HIM OFF BALANCE--
I'M TRYIN', BABY-- BUT HIS BODY'S GETTING HOTTER BY THE SECOND.
HIS SKIN RESISTS MY CLAWS--
I CAN'T TELL IF IT'S ARMOR OR AN EXO-SKELETON.

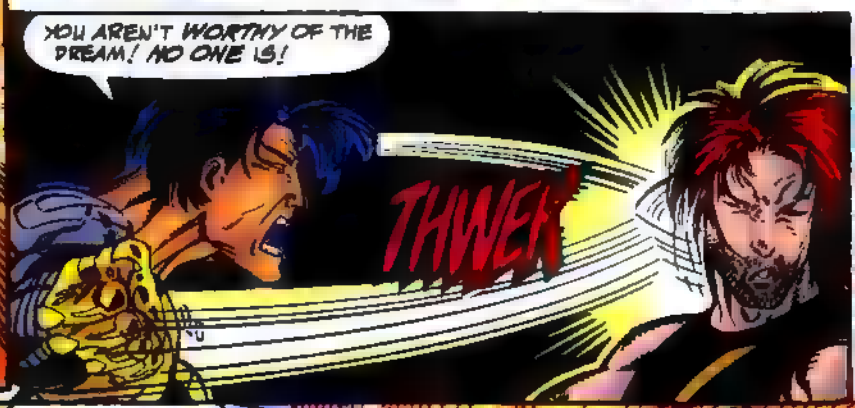
YOU CANNOT HOPE TO BEAT ME IN A PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION, X-MEN.
I DRAW MY STRENGTH AND FIRE FROM THE EARTH'S MOLTEN CORE.
YOU COULD NO EASIER CONTAIN A VOLCANO.
FWHAKK
FWHAKK
FWHAKK
YEARRRGH!
YOU'RE RIGHT, BRIMSTONE, A PHYSICAL ASSAULT IS POINTLESS--
THAT'S WHY I'VE EMPLOYED THE MINDFIRE MACHINE AGAINST YOU.
NOT EVEN YOU CAN WITHSTAND ITS FOCUSED TELEPATHIC FURY.
YOU BETRAY ME, CONTROLLER. WHY?
I WANT THE THEATRE, BRIMSTONE.
DO YOU THINK I'M CONTENT TO BE A MERE LACKEY?
MY HUNGER FOR POWER SURVIVED EVEN YOUR VIOLENT INDOCTRINATION.
X-MEN 2099 #22.

UPSTART! DO YOU THINK I'VE SPENT CENTURIES BUILDING THE THEATRE'S POWER BASE--
--ONLY [redacted] RELINQUISH IT TO THE LIKES OF YOU!
I'LL SEE YOU BURN FIRST.
YOU ARE WEAKENED, BRIMSTONE.
AND IF YOU ARE TRULY AS OLD AS YOU CLAIM, IT IS TIME YOU LAY DOWN AND DIE.
THE THEATRE NEEDS NEW BLOOD--
--AND I INTEND TO SPILL YOURS.
THE MINDFIRE BLOCKS YOUR CONCENTRATION-- SLOWS YOUR REACTION TIME.
ZWHAPP
UHGAH!
WHAT'S GOING ON, SHAKTI? IS X'AN BACK ON OUR SIDE?
UNFORTUNATELY, NO. IT APPEARS HE SIMPLY WANTS CONTROL OF THE THEATRE FOR HIMSELF.
ALL I CAN DO IS DISMANTLE THE PSIONIC REGULATOR ON THIS MACHINE...
...AND HOPE THE PSYCHIC OVERLOAD STUNS THEM BOTH!

MY LEFT HAND IS THE DESTROYER, BRIMSTONE--
--IT MOLECULARLY DISRUPTS ANYTHING IT TOUCHES.
IMAGINE WHAT IT WILL DO TO YOUR SKULL.
NOOOOO...
AT THE SAME TIME, THE MINDFIRE MACHINE'S PSIONIC REGULATOR STOPS FUNCTIONING--
--AND THE NEURAL AMPLIFIERS SIPHON THE COMATOSE TELEPATH'S ENERGY AT AN UNCHECKED RATE.
ZHAO'S BODY IMPLODES AS THE HUNGRY MACHINE CONSUMES HIS VERY ESSENCE--
--UNTIL, FINALLY, NOTHING REMAINS.
MY HEAD IS CLEARING--
--BUT I AM STILL TOO WEAK TO FIGHT--
AND IF I HAVE LEARNED ONE THING IN MY LONG LIFE, IT IS--
FWOOSH

--THERE WILL ALWAYS COME ANOTHER DAY.
DON'T TELEPORT AWAY FROM ME, BRIMSTONE--
WE'RE NOT FINISHED!
BOOM!
XI'AN--

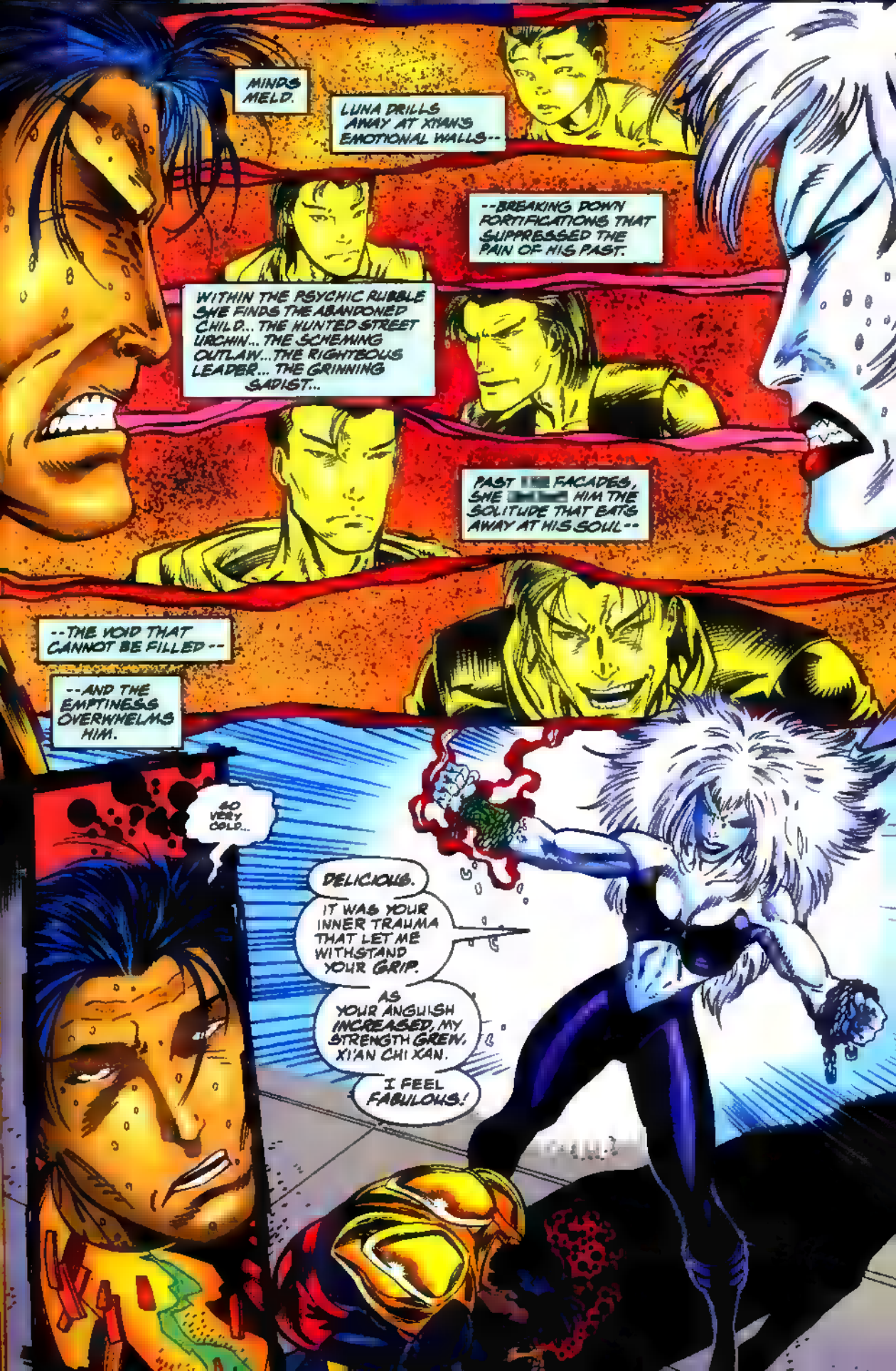
YOU!! YOU LET HIM GET AWAY. HOW CAN THE THEATRE BE MINE WITH BRIMSTONE LOVE STILL ALIVE?
WE CAME TO HELP YOU.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I NEEDED [redacted] HELP? THE X-MEN. WHAT A INSIPID IDEA THAT WAS.
YOU DON'T MEAN THAT. THE DREAM IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR!


YOU AREN'T WORTHY OF THE DREAM! NO ONE IS!
THWEK

TIM HANDLED THE X-MEN BETTER THAN YOU, XI'AN.

HE ROSE TO THE CHALLENGE.
YOU CRACKED UNDER PRESSURE.
BUT UNLIKE SHAKTI AND THE OTHERS, I OWE YOU NO LOYALTY.
YOU JOINED THE THEATRE, VOLUNTARILY. NOW PAY THE PRICE.
NOT GOING TO LET YOU GET INSIDE MY HEAD, WITCH...

UGH... YOU'RE MELTING THE CHAIN... AND MY ARM...
SSSSS

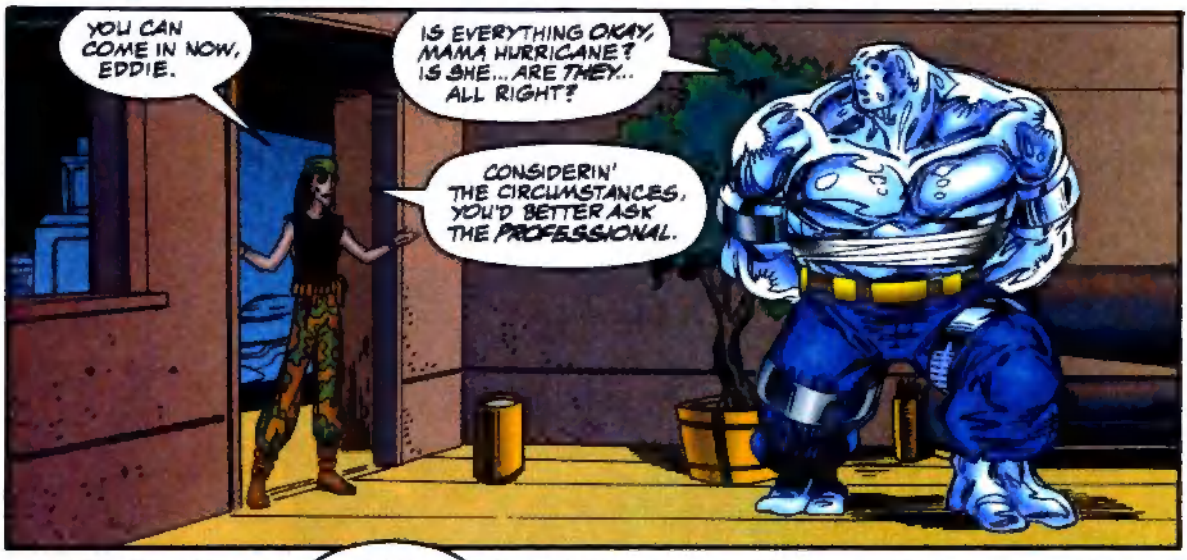

MINDS MELD.
LUNA DRILLS AWAY AT XI'AN'S EMOTIONAL WALLS--
--BREAKING DOWN FORTIFICATIONS THAT SUPPRESSED THE PAIN OF HIS PAST.
WITHIN THE PSYCHIC RUBBLE SHE FINDS THE ABANDONED CHILD... THE HUNTED STREET URCHIN... THE SCHEMING OUTLAW... THE RIGHTEOUS LEADER... THE GRINNING SADIST...
PAST [illegible] FACADES, SHE [illegible] HIM THE SOLITUDE THAT EATS AWAY AT HIS SOUL--
--THE VOID THAT CANNOT BE FILLED--
--AND THE EMPTINESS OVERWHELMS HIM.
SO VERY COLD...
DELICIOUS.
IT WAS YOUR INNER TRAUMA THAT LET ME WITHSTAND YOUR GRIP.
AS YOUR ANGUISH INCREASED, MY STRENGTH GREW, XI'AN CHI XAN.
I FEEL FABULOUS!

YOU'VE GOT NO GUARANTEE THE XI'AN YOU KNOW WILL EVER RETURN.
IT MIGHT BE BETTER IF I PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY.
NO, LUNA, YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH.
COLD...
XI'AN, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
SHAKTI!
LORD WHAT HAVE I DONE--?
HE'S A BASKET CASE.
[redacted] DEMONS LEFT HIM WITH NOTHING INSIDE.
I ALMOST FEEL GUILTY FOR FINDING SUCCOR IN HIS PAIN.
ALMOST.
HE NEVER LET ANY OF US CLOSE ENOUGH TO SEE HE WAS FALLING APART.
BUT LUNA'S TOUCH SHOCKED HIM BACK TO HIS SENSES, RIGHT?
IT'S TOO SOON TO ASSESS THE DAMAGE [redacted] TO HIS BRILLIANT [redacted] UNSTABLE [redacted]
FORGIVE ME...
AWOOGA AWOOGA
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
SIRENS AND GUNFIRE...

THIS FACILITY HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN BY ORDER OF THE PRESIDENT.
NOBODY MOVE. EVERYONE IS UNDER ARREST.
SHIELD AGENTS.
THEY MUST BE JUNKPILE'S BACKUP.
NICE TIMING. YOU STOP FOR DONUTS OR WHAT?
YOU'RE MAKING A MISTAKE. WE'RE NOT WITH THE THEATRE.
GIVE IT UP, SHAKTI. YOU CAN'T REASON WITH MEN HOLDING GUNS.
AT EASE, BOYS AND GIRLS--
THESE ARE THE X-MEN. THEY'RE THE GOOD GUYS.
THANKS FOR THE REFERENCE, PAL.
NOW, WHO THE SHOCK ARE YOU?

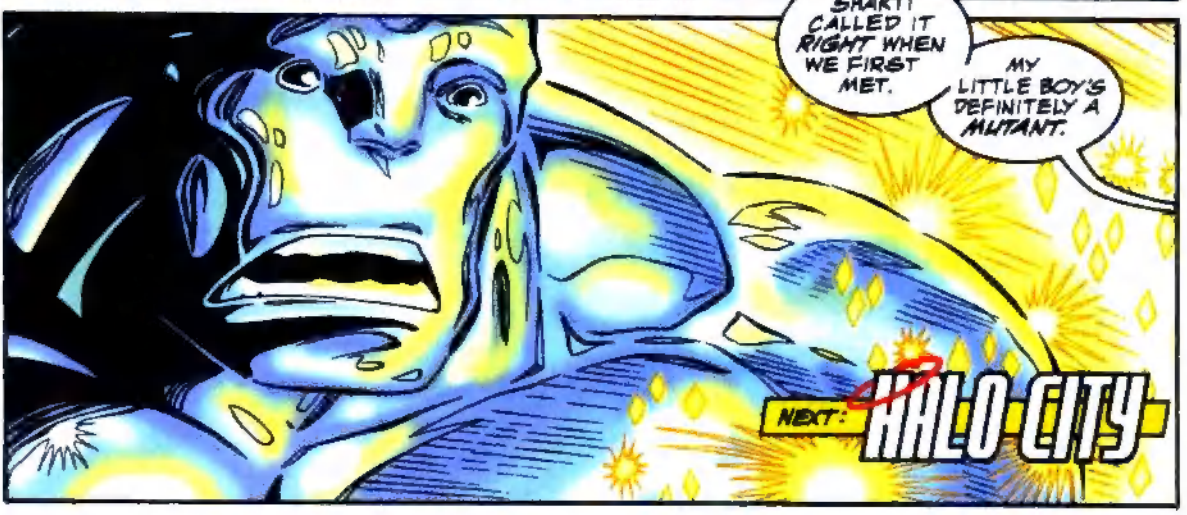
MORPHINE SOMERS IS MY MINISTER OF HUMANITY, TIMOTHY FITZGERALD.
WE HAD HOPED TO EMPLOY YOU AND YOUR COMPANIONS TO CLEAN UP THE WESTERN RED MARKET.
THE FLOODGATE SLAUGHTERHOUSE BEING THE MOST OBSCENE EXAMPLE OF THE EXPLOITATION OF THE UNDERCLASS.
IT WAS ONLY RECENTLY THAT WE LEARNED THIS PLACE WAS OPERATED BY THE THEATRE OF PAIN.
WE'D'VE BEEN HERE SOONER BUT THE NORNS WERE WAITING FOR US AT THE DOOR.
THEY ACED FIFTEEN OF OURS BEFORE A VOLLEY OF NEURAL SCATTERSHOT TOOK THEM DOWN.
MINISTRY OF SIGNAL HAVE A PHALANX OF NETDIVERS TRACKING DOWN THE THEATRE'S CLIENTEL.
THE AUDIENCE IS EQUALLY GUILTY FOR SUPPORTING THIS WHOLE SICK MESS.
WHAT ABOUT THE VICTIMS OF THIS BUTCHER SHOP?
THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HERE WHOSE LIVES HAD BECOME SO DESPERATE--
--THEY WERE LITERALLY WILLING TO SELL THEIR HEARTS AND SOULS FOR A FEW MEAGER CREDITS.
I HAVE MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THEM--AND FOR YOU.
TO THE WEST, I HAVE BUILT A CITY THAT WILL WELCOME THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE'S REFUGEES--
--REGARDLESS OF THEIR RACE OR GENE CLASSIFICATION.
YOU X-MEN ARE GOING TO BE THAT CITY'S GUARDIAN ANGELS.
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT, BOYS AND GIRLS?

EPILOGUE


YOU CAN COME IN NOW, EDDIE.
IS EVERYTHING OKAY, MAMA HURRICANE? IS SHE... ARE THEY.. ALL RIGHT?
CONSIDERIN' THE CIRCUMSTANCES, YOU'D BETTER ASK THE PROFESSIONAL.

EXHALE, EDDIE.
DOC WINGFOOT?
ROSA HAD THE MOST REMARKABLY PEACEFUL LABOR I'VE EVER SEEN.
AS FOR THE BOY-- WELL, THE BABY APPEARS HEALTHY.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

SEE FOR YOURSELF.
HI, EDDIE. SAY HELLO TO THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE FREAKSHOW--
--JOACHIM EDUARDO VASQUEZ.


SHAKTI CALLED IT RIGHT WHEN WE FIRST MET.
MY LITTLE BOY'S DEFINITELY A MUTANT.
NEXT: HALO CITY

2099
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MARVEL COMICS